

March 6, 2021

The Honorable Gary A. Winfield
The Honorable Steven J. Stafstrom
The Honorable Alex Kasser
The Honorable Matt Blumenthal
The Honorable John A. Kissel
The Honorable Craig C. Fishbein
Joint Committee on Judiciary
Connecticut General Assembly
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Raised Bill No. 6321: An Act Concerning Adoption and Implementation of the Connecticut Parentage Act

Dear Chairs Stafstrom and Winfield, Vice Chairs Kasser and Blumenthal, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and Members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Stephanie Ocasio-Gonzalez, and I am testifying in support of **Raised Bill No. 6321: An Act Concerning Adoption and Implementation of the Connecticut Parentage Act**. I am a resident of Bridgeport. I'm testifying on behalf of myself and my wonderful family: my wife Denise Gonzalez, our son Jayvin, and daughter Dessanie.

This year, Denise and I will have been together for eleven years and married for seven. Denise works security for the Stamford Train Station and I am a medical assistant at Reproductive Medicine Associates of Connecticut. Our 14-year-old son, Jayvin, is from my previous relationship. I gave birth to our two-year-old, Dessanie, in January 2019. The process of having a baby was a long, hard journey for us: I went through multiple expensive and painful medical treatments in order to conceive Dessanie. It was worth it. We have this amazing toddler girl with so much character for such a little person—she's so headstrong! I can already tell she is going to give us trouble later.

When I finally became pregnant with Dessanie, we were overjoyed, but we were also concerned that Denise would not be her legal parent because they are not genetically related. I even asked by OBGYN if my wife would for sure be on Dessanie's birth certificate. She responded, completely surprised, "Yes, why not? Why wouldn't she be?" And, in fact, because Denise and I are married, we were listed as "Parent 1" and "Parent 2" on Dessanie's birth certificate. Our fears, however, weren't unfounded. Connecticut parentage law still includes only "husband" and "wife," and does not have gender-neutral language that is inclusive of same-sex couples. And if we had our child before we got married, Denise would not have been listed on our daughter's birth certificate even though she is her parent in every way.

When I received Dessanie's birth certificate with both our names on it, I felt relieved. I assumed we were safe. But learned that—without a formal legal judgment of parentage, which a birth certificate is not—some states wouldn't recognize Denise as the lawful parent of our daughter, no matter what her Connecticut-issued birth certificate says. If we were to move and something were to happen to me, Denise might have no legal rights to care for either of our children. If Denise took our children on vacation to Texas and they got hurt, she might not be able to visit them in the hospital or make medical decisions for them. Even after everything we went through together to create another life—the fertility treatments and the financial burden—she just wouldn't be recognized as our child's mother. But the Connecticut Parentage Act would solve these problems. We would be able to complete a Voluntary Acknowledgement

of Parentage, and Denise would be recognized as Dessanie's parent in Connecticut and across the country.

The situation is even harder regarding Denise's relationship with Jayvin. Denise is as much of a mother to Jayvin as I am. Denise came into our lives when Jayvin was three years old. Denise was there for his first day of kindergarten, for tooth fairy visits, for doctors' appointments, and parent-teacher conferences. We make decisions together about his life and well-being and jointly provide for him financially. Most importantly, *our son sees Denise as his mom*.

Yet, because we live in Connecticut, she has no legal connection to our son. The only option to secure Jayvin's relationship with Denise is an adoption, which would be difficult litigation that would require us to terminate the rights of Jayvin's birth father, who is not involved in his life. We rely on the kindness of others to treat us both as Jayvin's parents. But we shouldn't have to leave our relationships with our children to chance. I lie awake wondering what will happen to my family if, God forbid, something happens to me. Denise could lose both her wife and her children, and my children could lose both of their parents. After a year of a global pandemic, these fears feel more pressing than ever. I have tried to engineer my will to make sure she gets custody of both our children in the event of my death, but I worry that it will be insufficient. I have had my mother pledge that even if our children came into her custody, she would give them back to Denise. But our children shouldn't be handed around like a hot potato if one of their mothers passes away when they have a stable home and another loving parent. And same-sex couples shouldn't have to worry about death before we create new life.

The Connecticut Parentage Act would protect Jayvin and other children in his position. Under this bill, Denise would be the de facto parent of Jayvin by virtue of the fact that she is functionally his mother—she wakes him for school every day, helps him with his homework, and loves him with her whole heart; our friends and family all treat her as Jayvin's mother; and Jayvin views her as his mother. With my support, Denise would be able to petition the court to establish herself as a de facto parent. If Denise were Jayvin's de facto parent, our legal status would track out family's reality. Jayvin would have the security of having two loving mothers, and I would know that Jayvin would continue to have his mother in his life if something were to happen to me.

Denise and I aren't the only same-sex couple in Connecticut struggling to secure their relationships with their children: many mothers in same-sex couples that I know personally are legal strangers to their children.

I urge you to pass this bill, and make Connecticut a state where *all* families are treated equally, regardless of marital status, gender, or sexual orientation. Our children's futures depend on it.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Ocasio-Gonzalez